

MAJOR CROPS - 25

period of at least two months. Women are again hired to do the job. But this time, the women from Vasilika and from the neighboring villages who had been free to do the hoeing are not necessarily free to spend away from home the prolonged period required for picking. The local women can and do hire out when they are free, but they can be free only sporadically, for their own fields also need some attention every day, even if their cotton production is not extensive. Therefore, the intermittent wage labor of the neighborhood women is augmented by labor from more distant regions where no cotton is grown, and where the early fall is therefore a slack season in the agricultural cycle. In 1933, six Vasilika farmers took the train to Trikala (near Larissa) and brought back with them thirty women who then worked in Vasilika for almost two months. Each of the farmers took responsibility for five or six women; he paid their round trip fare, put them up in his home, and furnished them with food. As a net wage, he paid them for picking the cotton in his fields one to two drachmas per *oka* (one *oka* equals two and eight-tenths pounds) of cotton picked. A serious, mature worker can regularly pick about forty *okadhes* a day.

In the picking season the farmer's main concern is to finish the job before the winter rains set in. If prolonged rains come early, the value of the cotton is lowered, and the processing of it involves additional expense. If the cotton has to be picked while it is still damp, it must be picked with the pod, and later must be separated from the pod by hand. The farmers paid hired workers a drachma per *oka* for the job.

While the women are picking cotton, the men of the household weigh the filled bags, keep records of the amount each woman picks, and use the horses, donkeys, or mules to haul the cotton from the fields. It is stored in the stone barns, in the lower storage rooms of the houses, and, as a matter of fact, when other space is no longer available, in any room in the house. Trucks from the cotton gins in Levadhia come through the village and collect the cotton. Farmers keep track of the weight of cotton they send to be ginned but do not identify their own sacks. The ginning costs six percent of the original weight of the cotton, a percentage which the gin owner keeps for himself. The farmers use the seed returned to them for the next year's planting, and also have some of it pressed into cakes for use as supplementary fodder for the ewes at lambing time. The cotton itself is again stored in sacks to await sale to merchants who visit the villages. During the season, the cotton is also used as a medium of exchange. Itinerant vendors selling fish or oranges, for example, are willing to take raw cotton instead of cash in payment.

The price at which the farmers sell the cotton to the merchants is never high enough to satisfy the farmers, who feel they get a disproportionately small share of the ultimate value of the cotton. We were once host to some urban visitors and to some of the village's leading men. In the course of the afternoon a heated and eloquent discussion on cotton prices developed. The farmers contended that by the time they paid the costs for machinery, fuel, hired labor, and calculated, in addition, the value of the labor of the members of their households, they made scarcely any profit at all on the cotton. The visitors, on the other hand, insisted that it was wrong to include the labor of their households as part of the

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248 26 THE FAMILY: ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

435 cost because for the women, in particular, work on the farm was a way of life.
"After all, what else would they do?" the visitors contended.

248 The discussion was extraordinarily illuminating because of the clarity
472 with which it defined the villagers' overt conception of their own purpose in
farming. The Vasilika men were thinking of their farms as commercial enter-

451 prises and were applying to their operation, however unwittingly, modern cost
434 accounting principles whereby the labor of members of a family is a proper
461 charge against profits in a family enterprise. The Vasilika farmers do not actually
keep sets of books on their farming operations, but they do keep records, in an

unsystematic way, of some transactions. Even though they do not keep exact
accounts, they think of their agricultural activity as a business enterprise and
evaluate the success or failure of their family farms in monetary terms. The
visitors, in contrast, were recommending that Vasilika's farmers think of them-
selves as peasants, not as entrepreneurs. In other words, the visitors were sug-
gesting that farming in the Boeotian countryside is a way of life. They meant
that its satisfactions should come as much from the means as from the ends. For
the women, at least, the visitors contended, work in the fields and in the sub-
sidiary agricultural tasks was as good a way to pass the time as any other and
that their work was merely one aspect of their roles as wives and daughters. The
farmers said, in effect, that their women were performing specialized agricul-
tural tasks primarily as a means to an end, the end of earning a profit from the
operation of the family farm. Therefore, contended the farmers, when women
do agricultural jobs, they are properly considered as agricultural labor, like the
hired workers with which the households ordinarily supplement their manpower.

[242] The villagers' arguments were entirely consistent with their behavior. To
accept machinery and chemical aids which increase yields and save time, as
Vasilika's farmers have done, presumes that they place a value both on quantity
of production and also on man-hours of work. In other words, they run their
farms, at least partly, from the standpoint of rational economic efficiency. Actual
accomplishment of efficiency is far from complete in Vasilika. Our point here
has to do with attitudes and tendencies.

249 The tobacco crop gives an even greater cash yield than cotton in relation
434 to the investment, and its cycle of production fits well into otherwise slack
656 periods. Vasilika's farmers would prefer to raise more tobacco, but the acreage
devoted to this plant is centrally controlled by the Greek government. Each
[221] year, farmers are assigned the right to plant a specific number of *stremata* to
tobacco, with the variations dependent on the anticipated world market for the
crop.

249 Men plow tobacco fields in November at about the same time and in the
221 same way as they do the wheat fields. In December, the men prepare the frames
[462] for the tobacco seed beds, and the women plant and tend the seeds. The seed
beds are usually near the farmer's house. During this month, the canes which
will later be used for hanging the tobacco are cut and stored. The villagers use
burlap lightly stretched over reed frames to protect the seedlings from the cold

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exchange for their agricultural products they get, kerosene, thread, buttons, needles, rice, sugar, tea, dried fish, beans, candy, olives, olive oil, soap and salt. Most farmers hang around the bazaar corners to watch the bargaining tricks of livestock merchants, visiting other friends from other villages, or buy and sell ocn, or watch the bazaar price for different commodities. These bazaars for many farmers are reliable centers of information, to know how he can advantageously exchange his goods for the needs of his family. Based of long experience, the farmer has found it safer to keep his goods rather than money. Money, he thinks, creates more enemies than anything else.

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The economic system which the farmer of Megali Vrissi and in general the farmer of the area developed is peculiar to one crop farming. The farmer usually makes all his purchases from one merchant, who could give him credit and collect it at harvest time in kind. The farmer goes to the market once a week for his needs. His merchant keeps the account. The farmer never keeps any account and never tries to investigate his accounts fearing he may lose his chance of getting credit. If the merchant is sincere and God-fearing and does not /21/ like to cheat the farmer, the farmer may be lucky, but I question this since my experience in that area proved to me, that in spite of the large amount of non-collected debts, the merchants were far better off than the farmers. At harvest season the merchants gather around the coffee houses. They carry scales and a sack, and go from house to house to collect the debts in kind. If the farmer had a poor year, he usually pretends to be missing from the village so as to delay his year's payment and postpone it for the coming year. Hard feelings usually develop and if the merchant stops the credit he may lose what he already has to collect. Thus the farmer is tied up to the merchant and the merchant is forced to continue credit to the farmer. Bad years usually create hard feeling between these two groups. The agricultural bank which tried hard to displace the merchants could not very well do it. The loans it offered were very little and could not cover all the needs of the farmer. The

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few handmade embroideries. Seldom one finds a bedstead, but boards nailed together serve as a bedstead.

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How is the money spent? The men keep the money and the accounts but the women save the money from the eggs and the poultry which they sell. The man never gives an account to the wife of how he spends his money. She is supposed to work hard but should not question how and why the money was spent. The farmer is interested only in his farm enterprise, that is his oxen, implements, seed and repair of the buildings. The women are responsible for the rest. Often conflicts take place due to the stinginess of the husband to spend money for clothing of his wife and children and for food. It is not unusual to find men spending money for getting drunk or gambling.

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Some farmers do spend their money in buying more animals, implements and improving their poorly built houses. A large part of the money is spent in buildings. The more the farmer becomes civilized the more his needs increase.

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/33/ Food consumption. The main diet is bread. The people are used to prepare three kinds of cereal from wheat and barley. Barley is shelled and cracked and used for soup with milk. The wheat is boiled, dried and then finely cracked and used as cereal. The wheat flour is baked with sour milk and tomato juice, dried and when pulverized is used for soup. Macaroni is prepared from wheat flour, dried in the oven and stored for winter.

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Besides the above they have dried beans, chick peas, canned dry cheese. During Christmas they all kill a pig which they cook and keep it till late in summer. The lard is used for cooking. Since vegetables are plentiful they supplement the dry food. Milk is precious and found only during spring and summer months when pasture is plenty. Eggs and poultry are luxurious and are sold on the market. Seldom the family kills a chicken. The diet centers around wheat products and vegetables. Pickled cabbage, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers and bread are the best combinations for hard work. Olives and olive oil are consumed daily with bread. The basic fat in cooking is olive oil or linseed oil.

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